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Pottery, the multi-sensual medium

Ryan Bothamley

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rick Hirsch, Julia Galloway and Eileen Bushnell
In Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Pottery, the Multi-Sensual Medium

By
Ryan J. Bothamley

September 13, 2008

Final Approvals

Chief Advisor: _____
Print Name Signature

Date: _____

Associate Advisor: _____
Print Name Signature

Date: _____

Associate Advisor: _____
Print Name Signature

Date: _____

Chairperson: _____
Print Name Signature

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Thesis Proposal

The search for beauty, nourishment, and celebration of life can be found within thoughtful hand made pottery. These objects help create, recreate and bring together a community. The most intimate, personal, and enriching objects are useful and found in the home. I strive to create pottery for occasions, to celebrate a memorable event or to make the everyday routine include more significant moments. I want my pottery to be so captivating that a viewer will be compelled to interact with it. My hope is that the use of these pots will create more significant moments within the user's life. While producing and sharing my work, I also wish to share concepts of nature, nurture, community and support of a social message.

There have been many people that have inspired my work through conversations and dialog including teachers, and class mates. Formal inspirations include, historical ceramics, biological structures such as plant seed pods, crustaceans, and other forms found in nature that have presented an inner and outer contrast. The balance between outside and inside space is a driving force in my work. For example, the crude outer shell of an oyster juxtaposed against the smooth, pearly inside. The contrast of rough to smooth is also a statement of contrast of form and surface. Pottery is both visual and tactile, capitalizing on the unique quality of being a multi-sense media.

The intense focus on the creation process is such that, for me, process is inseparable from the product. It is of great importance that the evidence of an object's creation and the material of its genesis be a major presence within the work. Ceramic

processes involve four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. Each is an essential component necessary to create the finished ceramic object. The philosophical idea of alchemy dovetails with the ceramic process. The four elements, as primal archetypes in our subconscious, intrigue me.

My thesis body of work was created using and integrating the following concepts;

- Celebrating the occasion or making the occasion a celebration through the interplay of art and function;
- Contrasting and comparing the differences in nature between coarse protective exteriors and refined and sheltered interior objects; and,
- Optimizing the opportunity clay gives the artist to communicate directly to others, hand to hand.

Experiencing Pottery through Maker and User

“The uniqueness of esthetic experience is in turn a challenge to thought. It is particularly a challenge to that systematic thought called philosophy. For esthetic experience is experience in its integrity – combining expression as embodied in a physical medium with the work of the imagination and interpretation.”¹

John Dewy proposed that the unique esthetic experience is a challenge to thought and philosophy. Through the act of making a work, there is a dialogue between the maker and the medium. The esthetic experience is created within this conversation. The maker and the work both give, receive, and benefit from the creative process. The maker is also engaged as a viewer. The work is seen through interpretation and the imagination. Every viewer will have a unique interpretation and imagination, therefore, a large range of esthetic experiences will be the result of one work of art. Most of the potter’s dialogue is passed to the user through the sensation of touch.

The tactile component is a significant part of investigating and experiencing a piece. I seek to enhance this experience by using a rich contrast of texture, setting the stage for interaction that has a unique concept of function. Through the contrast of texture, and the functionality of my work, the viewer is invited to become the user, enhancing and merging one sense with another. The viewer interacts, bringing with them their own rich history of experiences which are, in turn, are projected on the work of art. Presentation is of great consideration as well. For example, how we arrange and display

work in cupboards, cabinets, on mantles or tables, sets the stage for this interaction as well as a great opportunity for expression.

It was John Dewey's philosophy that esthetic experience is the authentic experience. According to Dewey the esthetic experience is unsurpassed. Art is separate from the experience of the artist and art that has been divorced from the artist's experience becomes an object or objects of contemplation. The esthetic experience is all that art can be. There must be a beginning, middle, and an end to an esthetic experience, or it could not be distinguished from any other part of life. Without triggering an experience in the making, viewing, or in the use, the piece is dead. It is not art. Dewey believed that when experience collaborates with a medium, and then is unified with imagination and interpretation, the resulting effect is the uppermost figure of human accomplishment.

John Dewey's motivation was linked to his conviction of the value of human experience. For Dewey, the experience was not systematic thought or state of mind, but a self witnessed human act, a reaction to a catalyst. This process of making art and interpreting art leads into self-discovery and realization. Dewey was concerned with process before product, with learning by doing and with active learning. He created a model that takes experiencing art to a higher level.

“Pottery's potency lies in its resolution of dual realities. There is the obvious sphere of physical use: the realms of filling, pouring, caring, or perhaps brewing. Then there is the sphere of abstract use: the metaphorical realms of sustenance offerings, status delineators, emotional containers, or vital funerary accoutrements within a given

*cosmology. For pottery this duality of abstract and physical use confers both irreplaceable-no other medium can take its place-and indivisibility-the utilitarian, spiritual, and aesthetic are forever intertwine.”*²

We experience pottery through the sight of place settings, or the touch of a cup's handle. Taste and smell are commonly stimulated at a meal as well. Our hands find a particular place to hold a pot, and this creates a memory. Meal time can be enhanced and enriched by pots that challenge traditional utility, requiring attention to be given to the dinner company and the pottery set on the table. This dynamic relationship creates a collaborative dialog between the pot, the potter, and the people using it. It allows us to have the time and space for the softer, shinier moments, moments away from the rough and harsh modern environment of our daily lives.

Pottery, the Multi-Sensual Medium

“This whole question of the intimate relationship that pottery shape and surface have to the hand has one other profoundly important aspect. By emphasizing the functional connection between hand and form it can provide a bridge to understand a fundamental, but subtle and barely describable element in the expression of the visual qualities of pots. For these, in an allusive and metaphorical but quite definite what, refer to their experience-traces of moving hand gestures and their meanings. Many bowls, to take the obvious example, are in effect three-dimensional projections of the cupped hands making gestures of receiving and/or giving.”³

Pottery made by hand can bring a level of fundamental, perhaps even primitive, tactile investigation to a modern world that is overwrought with virtual stimulation. These objects can make the mundane extraordinary. Our minds have become trained for immediate gratification largely due to having access to so much advanced technology with instant results. Mass produced, disposable consumables seem nearly inescapable. Paper, plastic, and styrofoam have become commonplace in our world. I create objects that are the total opposite, in nearly every way, handmade unique, precious, personal, special and beautiful. The interaction through touch and use of thoughtful handmade objects allows us the opportunity to slow down a moment in perceived time, also fostering enjoyment through use. Though the use of these handmade pots, there will be the opportunity for significant moments created within the user’s life. Garth Clark

reflected this in his discussion with Betty Woodman when he says how her teacups enhance his experience of tea and coffee.

*“They were so seductive visually that I began to use them. After several months I discovered that they had initiated a new ritual in my life. Before using these cups I had simple, efficient coffee shop mugs for my tea and coffee- and as a writer consumed gallons of these beverages a week. I drank the tea and coffee absent mindedly, without enjoyment, gulping it while typing or else pacing around and sipping during a writer’s block. Betty’s cups brought that to an end. They cannot be used casually. Their balance is precarious and the act of picking and putting down a cup became a very considered action.”*⁴

My work will be seen in different ways by different people. One person might use a creamer daily, while another could receive as much enjoyment from viewing the same work as a nonfunctional piece, but not actually using it. I feel truly gratified when my work captivates the viewers, and compels them to interact in a way that produces a subtle and lasting effect. For me, making art is such a private, idiosyncratic method that attempting to write about such a dear practice threatens to trivialize it. I am committed to using clay because it is the medium most responsive to touch. There is immediacy to the work. Hands are the primary tool, and the maker is in direct contact with the evolving work. Once work is finished, it is released into the world for willing eyes to see and hands to feel. This experience is passed through form and texture from hand to hand. It is an accessible medium for communication.

Historical and Interpersonal Influences on My Work

The rich history of ceramic art is important to me because I want to understand more about the amazing story of the people who worked with clay and the objects they produced. Functional and sculptural objects made of clay have been created since the beginning of civilization and are a deep wellspring of inspiration. They are a baseline to judge and assess my work and my steps forward. These pieces offer a chance for me to use the product of other potters' talent, to stand on their shoulders, in order to create a fresh and stimulating new set of ideas to explore. Viewing these pieces of history is both a challenging and humbling experience. I have found influence in many different historical bodies of ceramic work. Developing personal connections within the vastness of historical ceramics is an ongoing investigation. I chose to present the historical influences which speak most specificity to my work.

Historical Late Minoan pots and Mycenaean pots of Crete feed my inspiration because they strive for graceful form. At my first sight of the fanciful use of marine elements, my attention was captured. Looking back with closer examination, I realize that it was the form, and not just the details, that carried most of the pot's voice for me. These were some of the first historical vessels I had ever seen in person. As a teenager interested in ceramics I visited The Museum of Fine Art in Boston and the image of seeing those pots for the first time is still very clearly imprinted in my mind's eye. The forms exuded both a sense of upward buoyancy and outward fullness.

As I consider other historical ceramic works that have a comparable heightened sense of lift and volume in form, I am in awe of Korean celadon of the twelfth century.

The forms suggest that these pots could be lighter than air, and they almost stretch toward the sky. The satin celadon is unquestionably the surface for these pots. These celadon glazed pots keep a sense of softness of the porcelain while at the same time seeming hard as jade. This skin becomes completely unified with the form. There is a feeling that the glaze is not covering anything up and the surface information of the pots' exteriors are holistic surfaces. This is a feeling that I strive for in my glazes.

I have a strong attraction to Japanese pottery, specifically the Oribe baskets decorated with iron and a splash of glassy green copper glaze. The asymmetry is startling and refreshingly playful, and the contrast of the green drips over the lively iron marking is so extreme. The objects of the tea ceremony are held so highly in reverence that it can not be ignored by any potter. There is an inescapable gravity that pulls many contemporary American potters to produce their version of a Japanese style. I am acutely aware of this because I mimicked Japanese pottery myself as I was developing my very own sensibility in clay. This was a valuable lesson and exercise for me. I hold Japanese tea ware to be of high influence in my work, although I do not attempt to recreate these objects.

Thirteenth century Medieval English pitchers and jugs hold a poise of figure that conveys an elegant and simple human form. Abstract shoulders, waist and hips have become a fictional pitcher in the most anthropomorphic way. Thumb prints around the pot's foot are stamped into the short and sandy earthenware. This statement in the raw clay becomes a rich contrast peeking behind the glimmer of leaded glassy glaze. I greatly appreciate the formal elements in these works. Although, these wares were made across the ages with considerable time between them, they resemble the human form and

embody certain vitality within the structure, as if there were an outward expanding force. I can imagine what the maker felt at the point these vessels were created. These pots have made a powerful and lasting impression on me.

As a life long learner, I have a deep fascination with historical ceramics which I will continue to investigate. As a maker, I do not consciously attempt to emulate or duplicate these particular forms. Instead, they urge me to attain the ideas that are apart of these forms, and blend them into the direction that supports the sensibilities of my work and interests. The thought that an individual's idea can be completed in a material that is so malleable and can be made permanent, is absolutely captivating to me.

During my travels I have been influenced by the ceramics in Central America, the ancient Mayan carvings and pots as well as more contemporary but similar work. To be specific, it is the monumental form of these pieces more than the decoration which draws me. Though some of the pieces I admire are small, the simplicity makes them appear to defy their size. A series of ceremonial Mayan bowls that I saw while I was in Belize continue to brine me to appreciate the seemingly large scale yet the actual size was rather small. On travels to Ireland, I was interested in the pots that had been dug from medieval earthen mounds, many of which were displayed at Trinity University in Dublin. I was fortunate to find a very old earthenware pitcher to purchase near Tipperary. Many potters hailed from that area because of the clay deposits there, and it is also where many of my ancestors came from. I sometimes wonder when I hold that piece just how connected to it I might be. I enjoy the simple timelessness of these pots, and the way they fit so comfortably into ones hand.

As I look at some of my work, I can see the influence of Antoni Gaudi. A major attraction of mine to Gaudi's architecture is his lack of hard edges and obvious geometry that is so familiar in most buildings. He has taken something hard and made it soft. Though an architect rather than a potter, his work contains sculptural and organic elements that I have often incorporated in my work. I particularly see it in his Casa Mila House, Barcelona, Spain: the organic sagging, and the chimneys which look as though Apartment they show the ribs made by a potter's hand as they were thrown. Antoni Gaudi sought to develop a utopian society enveloped by the gates and fantastic walls of Park Guell. The park is a place with an over all feeling of wonderment and is embellished with ornamentation encrusting fantastic organic forms. Gaudi represents a meeting of swelling and undulating organic form and ornament that my approach in clay has often incorporated.

I must mention the pottery of the George E. Ohr as source of inspiration for my work. Both the personality of George E Ohr and the objects of his creation fill my head with astonishment. Known as the misunderstood "Mad Potter", his forms in clay are as outrageously flamboyant as his personality was. This is illustrated when one compares his photography to his pottery. His mustache was an unmistakable inspiration for the amazing twining handles with which he adorned his pottery. His mastery over the material is clearly demonstrated in the delicate rippling folds and large scale of his wares.

While I recognize all of the sources I have mentioned as influential in my work, there is one more source of inspiration that is very helpful to me. It is my collection of contemporary work. This consists of pieces I have purchased and those which have been given to me. Seeing them in contrast and comparison to each other and as individual

pieces, having them around me daily, being able to hold them and use them is an ongoing influence on my work. The collection has been valuable to me in that way as well as being a reminder that I am linked to so many others by a common interest.

My investigation of form has been greatly inspired by predecessors whose work appears in art history books and in museums, and I have also been influenced by the exploration of nature and natural history. The arts were always important in my family, and some of my first memories are of homemade peanut butter flavored play dough, and of the way that salt dough would become hard and able paint after I made something and we baked it. I could not have been more than seven when a friend and I found a natural clay deposit in the wetlands behind his home. Making little pots of that clay and letting them dry in the sun seemed like the most natural and fun thing I could do. In my fourth grade art class, I made a bell of white stoneware that I had marbled with terracotta, and it became my first fired piece. Even then I marveled that the material for the clay projects came out of the earth and was made permanent by being heated. I was hooked on clay.

I was fortunate to attend a high school that had a large art department with intro classes in hand building and more advanced classes on the wheel. I spent all my extra time in the ceramics rooms making work, helping to reconstitute clay and learning to mix glazes. I was amazed that so many of the materials used in glazes were natural and came out of the earth, and that the combinations were endless. Again, as when I was much younger, I found deposits of clay in the wetlands and the streams near my home, and experimented with what I had found. I fired it at different temperatures, using it as the body of a vessel, then as a slip.

Now, as I do work and live my life each day, I am very conscious of my ceramic materials as natural elements, and of the natural history of these materials as well. When I am outside, I am aware of the landscape in relation to what materials it might contain, particularly if the land is cut away and I can see the layers of earth where it has folded and faulted. As I fish in a stream or lake, I always look for clay deposits that I might experiment with. The colors and forms that I observe in nature are a reference when forming and finishing my work. Colors are presented to in nature, become lessons to me as I choose color combinations for my pots. Natural history and nature itself have created a lifelong classroom for me, one that I continue to visit daily.

I have found kinship with contemporaries in different ways, and I feel connected to these artists by way of similar approach in my work. British sculptor Tony Cragg's sensitivity and reaction to various materials is a starting point for his work. He responds intuitively, and also from his association with his memories concerning material.



Figure 1 ⁵

Tony Cragg mentions that the word material originates from the Latin word mater-mother. Particular attributes of a material promote ideas which in turn help the artist create form. Tony Cragg demonstrates the material's sensation and capabilities.

Scottish sculpture Andy Goldsworthy uses natural materials in ways that astonish me, yet his work remains so honest in their construction. His stone and snow arch displays this directness of material. The snow's compression between the stone slabs has just enough tension to be self supporting. This contrast of physical tension gives the observer a seamless visual translation of the material's inherent property. Through the truthfulness of his handling of materials, the character of each material is highlighted. His sensibility, appreciation and consideration of raw materials allow such vast manipulation, and yet the natural grace of each medium is conserved.

*"I have become aware of how nature is in a state of change and how that change is the key to understanding. I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season and weather."*⁶

While I was working as a pottery instructor at Worcester Center for Craft, I found that Thomas O'Malley's work struck a comparable cord with my own, though he approaches his work from a different place and different sources of inspiration. His glossy pots appear to be as hard as little gems set in to the larger, craggy, rock-like bases.



Figure 2⁷

Peter Beasecker's carriers are also a beautiful statement about a refined balance of form and function.

*“As the word implies, a carrier is a thing of use, of utilitarian value. The ‘value’ implied in carriers such as these, with multiple cups within, is that they ‘behave’ communally. They are meant to be used by many gathered together in a communal ritual almost certainly acted out in a small duration of time. Even when not in use (which is most of the time), the carriers still actively, one could say even joyously, announce their communal intentions.”*⁹



Figure 3⁸

His graceful forms are sleek and linear, yet I was immediately drawn to his view of function. Formally, our work differs greatly, yet the content is based on a similar type of function. I find fascinating the way his content is based on interaction of community.

Through out the conversations and the discourse of my studies and work in ceramics the influences of my class mates and peers have shaped and developed my sensibility in clay. Of course most importantly, the work and teachings of my professors Rick Hirsch and Julia Galloway will always have an impact on my work. Our conversations have permeated my thoughts on all things related to clay. The diversity of these two professors challenge, question and provoke my own understanding of craft/art. I am so fortunate to have studied under these professors, each of whom contributed significantly to the field. Discussions regarding their differing points of view have been instrumental in building my strength to define my own sensibility in clay.

My Thesis Body of Work

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the color, texture and the form of marine life such as oysters, snails and coral. While living in Portland, Maine, I was able to take classes and study marine biology at the University of Southern Maine. This fascination is evident in much of my work. The spiral of a shell is reflected in the ribs made by my fingers as I throw. The images of a barnacle encrusted oyster shell have stayed with me.

I regard what I produce to be functional forms: pottery with a place and a special time for use in a home. This pot will hold juice, wine or vinegar for a salad. Its uses are left to be decided by the owner. It is a pot for Sundays or special occasions. It is an object to bring delight through the tactual investigation of surface as one uses it.



A pouring vessel on a base: this succulent, round, soft porcelain ewer perches atop the stout, rough, textured saucer. The composition of a saucer and pot allows one to enjoy the food or drink through the experience of two pieces which relate to each other: presentation in an extraordinary way. Lifting the smoothly rounded pourer from its rough and craggy saucer and filling a cup, then returning the pot to its place: lifting the ethereal from the earthly. This action heightens a sense of ritual, making the ordinary into the extraordinary.



The single cup and saucer sets that I prepared for my thesis exhibition are the items from which I have learned the most. The cups are small in scale, only three and a half inches standing without the saucer. A cup is the most used pot in one's cupboard. We use cups throughout the day. These realizations led me to my body of work. I gave cup and saucer sets to my professors, fellow students and to friends who are not involved in the arts, so that they could use them in their own homes. What I learned was incredibly valuable. I learned that this series of cups would certainly lengthen one's coffee break. It was often stated that the cup and saucer were a remarkable composition together, although during actual use, the cups were often used alone. In comparison, the oversized saucer makes an awkward dance partner for the petite porcelain cup during the action of drinking. Together they are not practical by any means, and, therefore, most people used my cups without the saucer. At first, this was unexpected and a disappointment to me, but it was an undeniable issue to be dealt with. I chose to embrace the issue, and I

learned from it. The bases are not the most utilitarian saucers for the cups, although they function as a resting place, and when not in use, a base's or pedestal's function is presentation and display. This understanding led me to my next group of work.

A teapot accompanied by four small cups nestled into a mantle. The body of a mollusk such as an oyster or a clam is called a mantle and this term regarding my work intrigues me. The tea service set is seated on the mantle which is installed on the wall. The shelf is installed using three large screws with wall anchors. Again, there is a textual contrast between the inside and outside of the mantel. The undulating flowing mantel's interior



Figure 4¹⁰

is framed by a coarser textured outer surface. Tension is built between the visual weight of the shell-like mantel and the appearance of floating against the wall. This gives a feeling of weightlessness, as if the piece were underwater. The mantle's function is to support and display the pots: an abstract "china cabinet" that becomes a part of the wall. This piece has a direct relationship with the architecture of a room, because it is attached to the wall. I pushed this relationship even further with the mantle of another tea service that hung in the corner on the wall.



Regarding the tray with four cups, the cups are porcelain and are left unglazed except for a faint iridescent luster. Their interiors are lined with a clear glossy glaze. Each porcelain cup is set on the tray which is made of stoneware and slip. The appearance of the cups on the tray is as if the cups are nestled into a soft pillow. During trials and the development of this piece, the function became apparent: a beverage service for a celebration. It approaches function from yet another point of view. This could be a centerpiece for a small gathering where participants are sharing a drink. The cups are completely round and are supported by the tray when not in someone's hand. One's perception and relationship to the cup changes whether it sits on the tray, or is held in the user's hand.

The creamer and sugar set invites play through its small scale and multiple parts. The pebbly textured stoneware sugar bowl acts as a pedestal for the delicate porcelain creamer. Inside the sugar bowl, there is a small, smooth, round porcelain scoop. The scoop is revealed the moment the lid is lifted, creating a pleasant surprise.

The pots I make may not be for everyday utility. I strive to create pottery for occasions, pottery which will be so captivating that a viewer will be compelled to interact with it. I build forms that beckon to be cupped by hands. It would be difficult to, hastily use the objects that I make, and this slower pace expands one's awareness and enjoyment of the moment.

Almost downy in appearance, the soft finish of the ewer is achieved through smoothing and sanding. Later, a thin layer of glaze is applied, a buttery satin-matt that becomes one with the clay's skin. The work is then fired in the soda kiln; not adding any soda carbonate, but using the kiln's residual fumes to further soften the edges of lips, lids

and spouts. The subtle atmospheric firing further accentuates a fullness of volume by highlighting and shadowing the form by using the fluxing vapor carried by the flame.

A pearl sits within a shell of an oyster. An egg is surrounded by a nest of twigs. It could be seen as a figure in a landscape. It could be someone on stage. The form is a statement of contrast between roughness and refinement. The pouring vessel is more advanced in the hierarchy of form in comparison to its supporting base. Base and the pot formulate a whole that, when presented together, creates a relationship of visual discourse. The base's encrusted texture is partially achieved in the course of the "burning out" organic inclusions applied within slip. The fossil impression is created with a small amount of pasta, cereal and grain. This presents an appearance of an outer shell covered in barnacles and marine growth.

Juxtaposed traits are a soft, delicate and refined interior against an exterior which is hard, heavy and coarse. While the inner shell is smooth and iridescent, the outside has the appearance of an accumulation of scars and the impact of outside elements.

*"Nests and shells cannot unite as strongly as this otherwise than by virtue of their oneirism. Here an entire branch of "dream houses" finds two remote roots that intermingle in the same way that, in human daydreams, everything remote intermingles."*¹¹

A pearl is created after a mollusk ingests an irritating grain of sand. Calcium is deposited over time and accumulated into the precious stone: alchemy created through biology, or a rough attribute turned into an embellishment. An egg holds hope for a new

creation, life and beginning. It needs care and nurture. A swelling ripe fruit's full volume is composed of nourishing flesh and the seeds that allow it to reproduce. Pottery can be concrete and abstract at the same time. A pot is a pot, but the visual content of metaphor and meaning is plural of what one sees at first as just a container. These conceptual ideas, metaphors and the spirit conveyed, are reflections and responses to objects of inspiration. This also reflects elements and traits of my own daily life and personality. When I am confused or uncertain about the direction of my work, the alternatives roll around in my mind like an irritating grain of sand in an oyster shell. With thought, struggle and work, I know it is possible to produce the pot I desire - to make a pearl. The pot may be a gem to adorn a place in a room, a catalyst to help one center down in one's home. Possibly this piece may wash a granule of sand from someone's otherwise bad day and turn it into a shimmering experience.

Alchemy and the Ceramic Process in My Work

*“I was going to say that our heads are our offices or charnel houses, as if creativity lived in a small flat in Soho. We know the mind doesn’t dwell in the brain alone, so the where of it is as much a mystery as the how.”*¹²

In the act of making my work, the time on the clock is not relevant, and my brain switches from being an engine running on language to one running on visual representation. Sometimes I believe, and jokingly tell people, that half my brain is in my hands. Artwork is a beneficial and healing meditation to me. Being inspired is never a linear path. It is a struggle and a cycle that sometimes leads me back to the beginning, often with a new perspective. There is always something additional to consider and with which to deal. Art is a vehicle that puts me in a mindset that feels natural. I focus so intensely on process, that I believe it sometimes overshadows the product. Although the process is sometimes seen as secondary to the product, it is of critical importance to me. I want the objects of my creation to pass on what I have felt during the making, and if the exultation that I feel is communicated through the clay I will have succeeded.

“Indeed, the principle of solidification is so powerful, the conquest of hardness is carried so far, that the shell achieves its enamel-like beauty as though it had been helped by fire. Beauty of substance is added to beauty of geometrical form. For a potter or an enamellist, a shell must indeed be a subject for infinite meditation. But there are many animals beneath the enameled glaze of this gifted potter’s plates that have made the hardest possible shells of their skins. If we relive Bernard Palissy’s passion in the cosmic drama of different sorts of matter, or in the struggle between clay and fire, we can understand why the humblest snail that secreted its own shell should have provided him with food for infinite dreaming.” ¹³

The innate primal character of the ceramic process is compelling to me; liquid, viscous, soft, plastic, leather, crackle, crumbly. The natural history of clay as a material is an influence in my work. Clay is a medium of memory. As I consider my body of work in clay, I am struck by the way two major interests have always been woven together: one, the soft malleability of clay; and the other, the excitement about transformation that takes place during the ceramic processes. As in alchemy the ceramic processes involve the four elements of earth, water, fire and air. Each is a necessary component for the completion of a finished clay object. The four elements are intriguing to me as archetypes in our subconscious.

Earth, or clay, is of primary importance to me as a material. It is the most responsive medium to touch. Hands are the primary tools, and the artist is in direct contact with the work. These are the main reasons I have chosen to work in clay. In the

making of a clay object, I respond to the inherent natural properties, and visual dialogue between process and design.

Water is a necessity and a symbol for all life that we know of on earth. It is what allows clay to be soft and able to be formed. The right balance of clay and water is crucial for the desired consistency. I personally prefer more water for a softer more responsive clay body. Many bodies of water, including the lake I lived on as a child and the ocean I lived by as a young adult, have also been tremendous sources of inspiration in my work.

Fire can be harsh and ruthless. Fire is also warmth; a hearth is a center of a home. The kiln adds heat to my studio in the winter. Fire gives clay the temperature needed to become mature and permanent. It is a force of nature that is manipulated and controlled to give the clay its hardness, and the glazes their fluid properties. Fire allows the potter to direct the clay's final outcome. I love using an element of nature in my process that is so dangerous and, at the same time, beautiful. It fascinates me that something so naturally destructive can create the most amazing objects.

Air is usually soft and enveloping. Air is necessary for fire, and also to the space within a successful vessel. Vessel forms that possess buoyancy and swelling are dealing with the space inside. The vessel holds energy when the walls are pushing outward from the inside. The air inside of the kiln is of great importance to me as well, and its imprint on the surface of clay is as important as the maker's touch. I am drawn to ceramic materials and processes that are sensitive to the kiln's atmosphere, and I want my pieces to show the method by which they are made. For this reason, soda firing has been one of my concentrations. My work is often fired a second time, and sometimes a third time for

luster. First oxides are brushed on, and then wiped off. After that the glaze is applied by brushing and dipping. Firing in a soda kiln is next, then a cone six firing to deepen the surface. A complexity and depth of glaze is caused by the accumulation of surface information.

Conclusion

It is very important that my work is well crafted. I have learned to embrace craft as a rich source to draw upon and to manipulate for expression and communication. It is a tremendous satisfaction to create functional pieces, some of which may also be viewed as works of art. I believe that the most intimate, personal, and enriching objects are useful, used everyday, and found in the home. Food, nourishment, and celebration of life can be contained in a vessel. There are not many art forms that one is expected to touch and put to one's lips. Thoughtful handmade objects enhance the ritual of a morning coffee, the enjoyment of a meal alone or with others and tea at night.

In their way, these objects help to recreate and bring us together in community; something that has been lost in our fragmented lives. Modernization and industrialization have literally scattered us. Swamped by technology, we are losing our connection to the earth, to ourselves and to each other. It is important for me to know where the things I need come from. Strawberries from a neighbor's garden, fuel wood from a tree behind the house, a mug made for me by a friend: the more of these sources I have in my life, the more grounded I feel. A handmade cup may not save the world, but there is great comfort in holding a warm mug of coffee and feeling the maker's touch fired permanently in clay. With my art, I try to deconstruct the isolation that I feel as I live my life in a modern technological world. I hope to do the same for those who use my work. With my work, I hope to promote a sense of community and wholeness of self, and to express the happiness I feel in being grounded and alive. I live as gently as I can, and I make and appreciate useful handmade objects.

As I produce my vessels and others use them, I wish them to feel the influence of nature that I have felt in the creation of each item. I want them to experience a sense of being nurtured as they view or hold a beautiful handmade ceramic piece. In a fast paced world filled with industry and technology, it is my hope that people feel some sense of community as they experience objects crafted by hands out of natural elements. The social message may be as small or as large as the fact that one cannot hold a beautifully created clay pot that has been imprinted with the maker's touch without feeling more connected to others and to the earth.

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